

STATE STRATEGIES AND USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES

(1) Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities to Address Needs Identified in the Comprehensive Assessment and to Achieve Identified Goals and Priorities.

This is a description of the strategies intended to improve the number of employment outcomes, the percent of individuals achieving an employment outcome; the number of individuals achieving an employment outcome at or above minimum wage; the service rate to individuals with the most significant disabilities; the service rate for minority individuals; and the employment outcome rate for minority individuals.

Based on the results of the DVR and WRC needs assessment activities, these strategies are intended to improve the performance of the DSU with respect to the evaluation standards and performance indicators established pursuant to section 106 of the Act.

The strategies identified in the DSU's annual goals and priorities in attachment 4.12 (c) (1) address the issues related to the results of the DVR and WRC comprehensive needs assessment activities. Progress in achieving goals is described in Attachment 4.12(e).

Assistive Technology:

One of the major needs in the area of assistive technology is to disseminate information to VR consumers and DSU staff about techniques, devices and services that have been effective in helping consumers achieve employment outcomes. The DSU is collaborating with both UW-Stout and UW-Milwaukee on a project designed to more thoroughly analyze assistive technology needs and available statewide resources. The project involves consumer, staff and provider surveys as well as the development of a statewide resource inventory. The survey was conducted in FFY '06 and the survey results delivered in FFY '07. The DSU will use the survey results during FFY '07 to determine if there is evidence that changes should be made to the Assistive Technology services or resources delivered by the DSU. If changes are warranted, a plan will be developed and implemented.

Community Rehabilitation Programs:

The DSU actively works with community rehabilitation programs to identify new services, new patterns of services, and methods of payment. Based on feedback from the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council, VR counselors, service providers and consumers, the DSU has identified a need to improve the provision of effective job development services for consumers with the most significant disabilities and multiple barriers to placement. These individuals are referred to as "the most difficult to successfully place into employment".

The DSU contracted in FFY '05 with Employment Management Professionals, Inc. (EMP) to provide training and technical assistance for a major job placement services initiative focused on those who are the most difficult to place into employment. Three pilot projects have been initiated in the Eau Claire, La Crosse and Madison Workforce Development Areas to provide training to DSU staff and vendors. The training is aimed at implementing new techniques that more effectively engage employers in the process of recruitment, hiring, and retention of this target group. In FFY '06, it was determined that the training was having a positive impact on the DSU's ability to understand and address the multiple barriers faced by those who are most difficult to place into employment. In FFY '07, the EMP training will be provided to DSU staff throughout Wisconsin.

The DSU pays community rehabilitation providers and private entities for placement outcomes following a hire offer. The outcome method of payment based on a hire may not be best suited to those who are deemed the most difficult to place into employment. In FFY '06 the DSU is piloting a number of performance-based milestone payment systems among community rehabilitation program providers that we anticipate may lead to increased employment outcomes. In FFY '07, the DSU will use the results of the pilots to determine if any changes need to be made to the DVR employment services fee schedule or technical specifications for job placement services.

Workforce Investment Act Partners:

To assure that individuals with disabilities have access to the full range of services provided by the other Workforce Investment Act partners, the DSU has identified strengthening WIA partnerships as a major goal. DVR has co-located into fifty-five One-Stop Service Delivery Job Centers statewide. In FFY '07 all of the DSU's direct service delivery staff will be located in One-Stop Service Delivery Job Centers. The DSU provides training to One-Stop Job Center partners in serving individuals with disabilities and developing a greater awareness of programmatic and access needs. The DSU's order of selection wait list has meant that other job center partners have increased their provision of services to persons with disabilities.

The DSU actively participates with a Designated State Agency sister Division of Workforce Solutions in implementing the state's Workforce Investment Grant and in supporting the Disability Navigator projects. Wisconsin has been a national leader in developing Job Center accessibility assessments and plans to resolve accessibility issues.

The DSA enters into a statewide MOU with the other entities that are partners in the One-Stop Service Delivery System under Title 1 of the Workforce Development Act. The DSA replicates the agreement throughout Wisconsin in cooperation with 11 local Workforce Investment Development Boards. The DSU also enters into a memorandum of understanding with each of the 11 Local Workforce Investment Boards in Wisconsin. The DSU's MOU addresses operation of the One-Stop service delivery system including a description of services and methods for referrals. The DSU works collaboratively with One-Stop partners on common intake, interagency referrals, and to facilitate job placement with employers. Through the DSA statewide and local MOUs with the One-Stop Partners and Job Center network and the DSU WDA-level MOUs, the requirements of 34 CFR Part 361.23(b) are satisfied.

Ongoing Innovation and Expansion Efforts

In FFY '06 and '07, the DSU is engaged in ongoing innovation and expansion projects to address the following needs:

- Expanding and improving the provision of supported employment services to reduce the reliance on state and county funding of long term support.
- Improving job development and placement services for those who are most difficult to place.
- Expanding and improving services to persons with severe and persistent mental illness
- Expanding IT employment opportunities
- Expanding self-employment opportunities in the Business Enterprise Program

Whenever possible, the DSU uses a collaborative co-funding strategy with other public partners to fund innovation and expansion initiatives. The DSU has no cooperative arrangement funding to support services or I & E initiatives in SFY '06 or '07.

(2) Strategies for Outreach Activities to Identify and Serve Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities who are unserved and underserved.

Patterns of inequitable service delivery of individuals with disabilities unserved and underserved have been documented throughout the vocational rehabilitation process nationwide. Due a continued high demand for DVR services, the DSU has been operating under an Order of Selection for several years. In FFY '06, the DSU made the decision to delay activation of employment plans for persons with the most significant disabilities due to insufficient resources to support new employment plans. At one point during the year, there was more than a year wait for persons who had been determined

to have a most significant disability from the time of eligibility determination to plan development. For the first time, the DSU and WRC recognized that due to the inordinate length of time from eligibility to service, the OOS wait list constituted an "underserved group of individuals". In the last quarter of FFY '06, the DSU received a large increase in state match and was able to use the match to realign federal funds to the OOS wait list and new plan development.

The DSU continues to maintain its commitment to serving the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including individuals from unserved and underserved groups.

GOAL

The DSU continues its efforts to expand services to unserved and underserved groups with the most significant disabilities.

STRATEGIES

In FFY '07, the DSU will place a priority on serving persons with the most significant and significant disabilities on its OOS wait list in a timely manner. The DSU will strive to maintain immediate activation of employment plans for persons determined to have the most significant disabilities, and a wait of no longer than 3 months for employment plan development for persons determined to have significant disabilities.

The DSU maintains a focus on multicultural service and training issues. The DSU has identified its vital documents and these are available in Spanish and Hmong, as well as alternate formats, including large print, audio tape and Braille. The DSU continues to monitor its publications and other information to ensure that the list of vital documents remains current and that information that is needed to access services is available in other languages and in alternate formats.

The DSU acknowledges the requirements of the General Education Provision (GEPA) Section 47 and the need to have equitable access and participation in the DSU program service delivery system for individuals with special needs. In addition, the DSA has a statewide work group with representation from the DSU to provide services to Limited English Speaking individuals who are often unserved or underserved due to language barriers.

According to the state's SFY 06' - 07' biennial budget, program revenue is provided to the DSU from the Native American Gaming Initiative (NAGI) fund, for programs and services for Native Americans with disabilities at or near reservations. The DSU uses the these funds to match federal funds, and allocates the funds to Section 121 funded tribal programs, for the delivery of a variety of benefits to the Native American population in Wisconsin.

The DSU has two Native American Outreach Workers who are co-located in Milwaukee offices. These outreach workers have been employees of the GLITC since CY 2000. The DSU provides administrative support and trains and mentors the workers to increase the number of referrals, facilitate Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) with cultural sensitivity to Native American services and values and increase employment outcomes of Native American Indians. Census figures reveal that there are more Native American Indians living in the Metro Milwaukee area than on all the combined reservations in Wisconsin. Results indicate that the presence of Native American outreach workers has had a positive increase on referrals and IPE's are jointly developed with the input of the consumer, Native American workers and DSU staff.

Public Comment: Consumers still have trouble understanding the DVR process. People with cognitive disabilities have much difficulty with the process. DVR counselors need to do a better job to explain the process and to explain the fact that DVR is a process. Independent Living Centers are serving more people with limited or no English. We need DVR to do better outreach to non-English speaking people with disabilities. The trend of county services to go paperless and rely on computer driven decisions is posing problems for people with disabilities from other cultures or with limited English.

Response: The DSU has undertaken initiatives to serve the state's rapidly increasing Latino/Hispanic populations (see 4.12(a)). In Milwaukee, the DSU has counselors colocated at a job center run by United Migrant Opportunity Services, a Latino human service organization. Other offices have hired employ bilingual counselors. These efforts are aimed at increasing and improving outreach and service delivery in three of the largest Latino/Hispanic communities in Wisconsin. When the DSU does not have access to a staff member who is fluent in the native language of the consumer, the DSU also utilizes language translation services. The DSU agrees that language barriers pose a challenge to the delivery of DVR services and that staff must take the time and make the effort to surmount language barriers and achieve a full understanding of the DVR process. The DSU uses the Client Assistance Program DVR process chart to assist consumers in understanding the DVR processes and where their responsibilities lie. The DSU will work with CAP to get the process chart translated into Spanish in the next State Fiscal Year.

The DSU continues to provide vocational rehabilitation services to farmers with disabilities who have traditionally been underserved by the agency. Activities carried out under a partnership contract with Easter Seals Wisconsin include outreach (early intervention) and DSU staff training. Direct services to farmers with disabilities include farm site assessments, rehabilitation technology assessments, agribusiness self-employment plans and financial analysis of farm operations. This expansion project is nearing a very successful conclusion. The DSU received a statewide award in April 2005 for this partnership project and a national recognition award in 2006. Services have been greatly expanded and will continue statewide on a fee-for-service basis at the conclusion of the service expansion period.

The DSU maintains its MOU with the Department of Public Instruction in FFY '06 and FFY '07, and also assigns a liaison counselor to each of the secondary high schools in the state. DSU and high school staff have been trained on the collaborative and cooperative elements of the updated MOU. DSU staff attend IEPs and incorporate transition services in IEPs with the goal of having an approved IEP before the individual graduates from high school to achieve a seamless transition upon post-secondary matriculation.

The DSU's focus is to improve qualitative outcomes with performance based goals after the innovation and expansion projects end usually after a three-year funding cycle. The DSU has transitioned several I & E grants to outcome based service fees.

The 2005 Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council annual report documents the involvement of the council in the development of lasting achievements to improve services to individuals with disabilities. DSU staff provide presentations at council meetings on policy changes and jointly hold public hearing meetings on state plan updates. Council members serve on the DVR Policy Academy that is charged with reviewing current policy and recommending changes when appropriate.

(3) Strategies to Overcome Identified Barriers Relating to Equitable access to and Participation of Individuals with Disabilities in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.

The DSU recognizes that individuals with a disability often face barriers and disincentives in terms of accessing employment services. The DSU works collaboratively with others to help consumers overcome these barriers. Some of these activities are described elsewhere in this plan.

One barrier that prevents consumers from accessing supported employment services is the limited long-term support dollars available from the counties. VR, in concert with other partners, is exploring more creative methods for providing long term employment supports that might occur with alternative funding or no funding. Examples include: identifying employers in industries who might subsidize the costs of training, use of natural workplace supports, and creative funding of workplace support contracts, including the use of PASS plans.

The DSU has projects funded in Buffalo and Langlade counties designed to develop and document best practice innovations in the use of natural supports. Results from these projects will be part of statewide training for providers and VR staff over the next several years.

The DSU has also instituted cooperative arrangements in three counties to work more closely with county long-term support agencies as they implement Family Care – a managed care approach to human services. Each site is testing out methods of improving the use of natural supports. Funding is used for staff training and for incentive payments to vendors who effectively implement natural supports.

The DSU collaborated with several stakeholder partners to hold a “Supported Employment Summit” in 2005. At the summit, key representatives of state and county agencies as well as community rehabilitation agencies will focus on how to maximize the effective use of shrinking long-term support dollars. The DSU will continue in FFY '07 to work with summit partners to focus on identifying and implementing alternative strategies to providing long term employment supports in the face of decreasing county funding.